## Portland City Commissioner Nick Fish Section 8 Hearing Testimony March 6, 2013

## House Human Services and Housing Committee Roster

Carolyn Tomei, Chair, D-Milwaukie

David Gomberg, Vice-Chair, D-Central Coast

Andy Olson, Vice-Chair, R-Albany

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## **Remarks**

Thank you to Chair Tomei, Vice-Chairs Gomberg and Olson, and the Committee for taking up this important bill.

Thank you, Speaker Kotek, for your leadership.

The City of Portland strongly supports this legislation, designed to remove barriers to housing choice statewide.

The bill reflects a value we all share: that everyone, regardless of their income level should be able to choose which neighborhood they live in and where their kids go to school.

It also addresses a disparate impact that does not reflect our values.

Section 8 is a market-based program, and our current law limits choice and has the effect of concentrating poverty.

Federal rent assistance is a bi-partisan concept.

A Republican President, Richard Nixon, and a Democratic Congress established the Section 8 program in 1974.

Today, Section 8 is the largest public housing program in the country.

There are almost 7,000 tenant-based housing choice voucher-holders in Multnomah County alone.

Nearly half are families earning less than \$35,000 a year.

One-third have a disability, about half are people of color, and one in five is a senior citizen.

Voucher-holders are veterans, immigrant families, victims of domestic violence, older adults with disabilities.

They are the face of America.

Because Section 8 is the largest housing program in Oregon, we must get it right.

That means doing everything we can to make it work for landlords.

We have great partners in the landlord community, and they were instrumental in helping to shape the bill.

We should also tip our hat to Jill Riddle and the team at Home Forward for their pioneering work to reform the Section 8 program. Much of their work is reflected in this bill.

Finally, I'd like to dispel a misconception about the proposal before you.

This bill does not require a landlord to rent to someone with a voucher.

It only requires that landlords treat voucher-holders like they do you and me, and process their application through normal screening criteria.

There will be one noticeable change, though: newspapers will no longer run ads that say "No Section 8."

This bill is a step forward for the Section 8 program, for the families and individuals it serves, and for civil rights in the state of Oregon.

I urge your support for HB 2639.

Thank you.